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CHAPTER FIVE

THE LIFE CYCLE

Birth

843 The Trumai were well aware of the facts of conception, paternity, and [842] pregnancy. That menstruation ceased after conception was, of course, perfectly obvious to them, but it is uncertain whether this was considered a diagnostic of pregnancy. Maibu related some female gossip to Quain to the effect that Aloari's wife, Yumununwa, was pregnant. When Quain objected on the grounds that she had only recently menstruated, Maibu pointed out as indisputable evidence that her navel was protruding.

847 One of the Trumai women, the clubfooted, childless, and unmarried [732] Yawala, was pregnant during Quain's stay. She spent most of her time [848] in her hammock and received little attention, except from other women who kept insisting that they perform an abortion upon her. Abortion was usually induced by manipulating the abdomen, but also, it seems, by drinking certain "waters" of which the women had knowledge. Yawala resisted all urgings and maintained that she wanted a child "to hold in my arms."

Abortion was undoubtedly frequent, and infanticide too, and at times without the agreement of the husband. It is not known what, 843 if any, observances and precautions were taken during pregnancy 833 except that sexual intercourse ceased when a woman became very large because "it hurts her."

844 Parturition was accompanied by observances led by old Matiwana, 846 during which the men sat and smoked. The women held the laboring woman in a sitting position, in which she gave birth. The role of the husband before and after delivery was not recorded. After Aloari's son was born, however, his wife bled for three moons. During this time he had to drink a certain medicine. Quain's notes suggest that a form of couvade was observed.

[431] After birth, the only economic exchange that took place was a gift which the husband gave to the wife in payment for the child.

Early Childhood

162 The youngest child in the Trumai village was a girl between one and two years of age. The other girl was about six. Of the boys, one was about

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577 831 833 156 123 Yanahi was less inhibited than any of the other men, but his behavior was not considered shocking or immoral. Quain had apparently arrived at the village just at the time that Yanahi was on the threshold of sexual experience. He appeared in Quain's house one night to show that he had an erection and announced that he would soon be having coitus. Thereafter, he rarely failed to tell Quain of his exploits. One night quite a crowd, including Yanahi and one of his paramours, Vatsiat, was gathered in Quain's house. The young man suddenly developed a longing for her and, as soon as all the visitors had left, satisfied his craving noisily amidst Quain's pots and pans. He was proud of his virility, as were most of the Trumaí men.

577 831 562 837 No discredit attached to the male involved in a love affair and very little to the woman. Oirupa merely scolded his sister for having copulated with Yanahi. Only where adultery was involved did promiscuity lower the status of a woman. Chastity before marriage was not expected, and there was not a single virgin in the village over the age of puberty. Older women without husbands or close relatives to protect them were often used for sexual purposes against their will. This was especially the case with unmarried foreign women. Some of them complained that they had to dispense their favors to too many men too often.

831 152 583 [123] This aggressiveness and the danger of bride-capture made the women extremely fearful of being raped, and, as noted above, they were uneasy even when the threats were made in fun. One morning Quain decided to get rid of his numerous female visitors by employing this device. They all fled except one, who, despite her seeming courage, looked worried. Without doubt, the women enjoyed visiting Quain, but a man told him that if he were to have intercourse with any one of them, they would all fear him. Over and above this fear of rape, there [578] was a definite hostility between the sexes, which was usually well controlled, but which on occasion might explode in open quarrels between the men and the women.

576 514 827 No cumbersome taboos surrounded physiological functions. Belching and the release of flatus were common in company, but generally disregarded. However, if an unusually unpleasant odor followed, those nearby spat on the ground as a mark of disgust. The men urinated near their houses or at the edge of the village plaza. The women went to the edge of the village clearing or behind the houses. Both sexes went a short distance into the brush to defecate, but at night elimination was permitted in the village plaza if a hole was first dug for this purpose and covered over.

There was no salacious attitude toward body processes. The Trumaí were puzzled by Quain's desire for privacy in his personal habits and his curiosity about other people's. One woman seriously asked if she could watch him eliminate.

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105 181 421 [578] 431 [855] "Tremendous interest in property, together with a simple and declining culture, results in my being a seriously disturbing element in their lives. Casual conversation always degenerates into a squabble about gift-giving .... There is intense pleasure in possession. Children get no sympathy when they are hurt, but objects are usually given to them. Every child has the right at least 'to see' anything he desires. In this respect children are pampered. Adults whine for things; withholding a desired object makes them intensely unhappy. Aggressive possession is admired.. Trade games make the exchange of property very fluid. Yet values in trade are well defined, and there is no prestige in giving more than one gets. Within the kinship circle, however, the old lavish property on the young. A father's garden is spoken of as that of his five year old son. There is a deliberate attempt to instill aggressive ownership attitudes in the young. A three year old girl is taught to claim objects in a loud voice. This is done by shouting the possessive pronoun....

[430] [524] [858] [431] [865]

105 [361] "These are a settled people who live within the strict limits of their village. Their small number has advantage in the study of individuals. They have no knowledge of the world beyond the Kuluene-Kuliseu. It has no more real existence than the various inhabited regions of the heavens. The half dozen expeditions which have passed down the river have communicated with the natives only with signs. The one important result of such contact was division from peripheral tribes and the rise of metal tools. The disappearance of the stone industry, on which a defunct Trumaí moiety had a monopoly, has occurred within the last generation.[1] The increased leisure which probably resulted is not utilized economically.

[924] [182]

105 123 156 "The complete lack of self-consciousness among these people makes behavior observation remarkably easy. Before I knew any of the language, I could sit by the hour in various households and time the actions of people while they paid no attention to me. For instance, one man during twenty minutes of leisure lay down to rest in his hammock fifteen different times, but each time disturbed himself with the remembrance of some petty chore undone....

[867] 105 [574] [833] "The only restriction of behavior that I have seen in casual intra-village personal relations is that the children are told not to litter the floor. The only positive rule is that the head of a household must sit with a guest and converse while the guest is inside his house .... Furthermore, extra-marital sexual intercourse has occurred in a shadowy corner of my house.. This lack of self-consciousness contrasts strongly with the Karajá, who are more prudish than the Fijians....

105 162 831 "Shortage of women, because of theft of young women, polygamy, lack of sexual interest in old wives (of which there are several), and

[616] [1] Quain refers here to the moiety-like division of the Trumaí which has been discussed in Chapter Three. This appears to be rather a result of the merger of the northern and southern Trumaí villages. The latter specialized in axe-making.

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post-natal sexual taboos is a serious social problem. A large group of not very pretty bachelors must use the woman with ringworm or the Suyá captive, whose present marriage is considered dishonorable. These women have no brothers or fathers. In contrast with Karajá, there is no stylized homosexuality. Yet the complete freedom of sexual play results in activities which might be considered overt homosexuality. But to the Trumaí such activity has little emotional content. It does not seem to set up special personal relationships.

"Women are in constant fear of attack. Yet a wife tyrannizes her husband by withholding her favors and pulling the hair of anyone whom she suspects her husband has used sexually. Between married people, sex occurs at night — preferably when everyone else is asleep — or while going to the forest on various gathering tasks. A man and his wife engage in many things together, such as afternoon relaxation, fishing, and gardening. There is companionship even between those spouses among whom the wife is much older and no longer of interest to the man sexually.

"Between themselves, the men are extremely individualistic. Cooperation rarely exceeds kin limits even at the explicit order of the chief. Only when outsiders are present do men band together in a mock display of solid cooperation.... There is only one old man, who is about seventy — all others are under 45 ..... All death is murder. Nobody expects to live longer than the next rainy season. Men always carry bows and arrows for protection. Shamans keep the village in constant fear of attack from the Suyá or Kamayurá.... There are imaginary attacks quite often. Men gather in terror at the center of the village — the most exposed spot — and wait to be shot at from the dark bushes at the margin of the village....

"Authority is lax. The patrilineally hereditary chief does no work and is a parasite on his household. He is self-conscious of the rank of his wife whose marriage has elevated her. He lounges in his hammock, but it is his duty to orate from the center of the village at night and sometimes in the morning, urging the men to undertake group projects. He is the only man who has the courage to be an executive. This contrasts with the Kamayurá where there are several chiefs who, uniquely in their culture, are shy and ashamed to speak and whose orders must be referred through special talkers. It also contrasts with the Karajá where the chief is the best worker .... When the season changes, the Trumaí chief urges the people to engage in the new work, which they would do anyway. An example of the complete independence of spirit is illustrated by the two brothers who would not help the brother-in-law of one build the house in which they all were living, because they thought the mosquitoes would be bad in that location during the rainy season. The brother-in-law built the tremendous house all by himself — the two brothers lived comfortably in it.